

Sermon for Sunday October 2, 2022
Luke 17:5-10

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength, and our redeemer.

Someone once asked me if my **little talks**, on Sunday, morning were sent to me by the National Church. I answered no; I write the reflection or sermon that I preach. It takes about two days to research then write, then rewrite and rewrite again. I don't factor in the hours I spend worrying about the sermon's content and quality before I offer the sermon on Sunday morning that anxiety ridden time is on me.

Another person asked me how is it that I know which scripture lesson to use on a Sunday morning. My answer is that sometimes I have an idea in my head and a scripture lesson just find it's way in support of my theme. But most of the time I use what's called the common lectionary, which is a prescribed group of readings for each Sunday based on a 3 year cycle. This morning's suggested lectionary reading from the gospel was the one that was read from Luke's gospel. Now the lesson made me squirm with all the slave language and I would have been glad to find something else to source today's sermon, but sometimes scripture just grabs you and it will not let you go. So let me share with you some of my thoughts arising from this challenging scripture lesson.

By the time we reach the seventeenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, the disciples have been sitting at Jesus' feet for quite some time. They have been commanded to leave security behind, along with everything else they hold dear, and to set out on a strange and difficult journey. They have been commanded to love their enemies, to forgive those who harm them, to give to all who beg from them. They have been urged to let go of their worries and trust God completely. And, just before our passage, Jesus commands his disciples to forgive anyone who wrongs them - even if it happens seven times a day.

In response, the disciples have an urgent plea for Jesus: "**Increase our faith!**" It is a reasonable ask, given the context; the disciples sense that they are going to need more faith if they are to follow the teachings of Jesus.

The answer Jesus offers sounds hopeful. All you need, Jesus says, is a tiny little speck of faith, about the size of a mustard seed. That much faith unlocks whole new worlds of possibility. And implicit in Jesus' words is his conviction that the disciples already have at least that much faith. In other words, Jesus asks his disciples to trust that they have enough faith already, enough to live out the challenging commands that they have been given.

So, the disciples might be feeling pretty good about this - a little faith goes a long way and they have at least a tiny bit. But just when the disciples might be tempted to think of faith as a possession that you can measure – like water in a measuring cup. Jesus shifts the term “faith” from noun to verb.

Jesus asks the disciples which of them would reward a servant for working out in the field by giving them a place at the table for dinner. His question would have seemed absurd to the disciples, who all lived in a culture of clearly defined functions for servant and master. Of course, a servant deserves no extra credit or displays of gratitude for doing exactly what he was required to do. The answer to Jesus' question would have been completely obvious to the disciples. Invite servants to dinner just for doing their jobs? No way. But this is a parable. And so, we can expect a twist. This time it comes at the very end. After telling the story in such a way that the disciples assume they are the masters, Jesus turns the table on them with these words, "So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'we are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done.'" Just like that, the followers of Jesus are **recast in the role of servants**, thus they are due no credit or gratitude for fulfilling the tasks assigned to them.

They have done what we ought to have done. This is a message about doing your duty, fulfilling your obligation, knowing your role.

Words like "duty" and "obligation" have acquired a mostly negative connotation in our culture. It is assumed that duty is dull, and one is somehow trapped in a horrible circumstance. If someone does something because they are obligated or required to do it, we see that as a lesser motivation. When we do good, we prefer to think of ourselves as free moral agents acting on our own selfless initiative, rather than as servants who are responding to the commands of a master. We want some credit for our acts of kindness and charity, if not a banquet held in our honor at least a place at the head table.

But the one who offers this instruction is Jesus, and Jesus came to serve, not to be served and it would seem this Jesus – our Jesus expects the same of those who follow him. I hate to say it but we in the church, we who are followers and disciples of Jesus, we are bound to fulfill our obligation. Our duty is to follow Christ's way in the world. We do not get to make up our own set of instructions and chart our own course. We are called, commanded, and compelled in very concrete ways. We don't have the luxury of hating those who hate us. We don't get to sit in the judgment seat and pronounce verdicts on those whose actions frustrate us. We are not permitted to grasp selfishly on to what we have and withhold from those in need. We are not even allowed to let anxious worry overcome us. We must do our duty. Not because we are wonderfully magnanimous people (though we may well be) but because we are servants, students, disciples, followers - called to do our part.

This morning I stand in this place asking myself what is my duty - what is my obligation as a follower of Jesus?

What is your duty - what is your obligation as a follower of Jesus?

Apparently, we have what it takes.

And this meal that you and I are about to share – of one little piece of bread and a bit of juice is all we need.

All we need to plant trees in the ocean and to change the world for good.

Luke 17:5-10

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. ⁷"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'